

Subject: CDC - Adults and Older Adult Adverse Drug Events - Medication Safety Program

[Skip directly to search](#) [Skip directly to A to Z list](#) [Skip directly to navigation](#) [Skip directly to site content](#) [Skip directly to page options](#)

[CDC Home](#)

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Medication Safety Program

Medication Safety Program

[Basics](#)

[Program Focus and Activities](#)

- [For Parents: Young Children and Adverse Drug Events](#)
- [Adults & Older Adult Adverse Drug Events](#)

[Campaigns and Initiatives](#)

[Resource Library](#)

- [Publications by Year](#)
- [Publications by Topic](#)
- [The PROTECT Initiative](#)
- [Partners/Members](#)

Adults and Older Adult Adverse Drug Events

On this Page

[Adverse drug events are a large public health problem](#)

[Some medicines require blood testing and these are more likely to cause serious adverse events](#)

[Unintentional overdoses of pain relievers cause many deaths](#)

[Some medicines may not be effective in improving your health](#)

[For More Information](#)



Medicines cure infectious diseases, prevent problems from chronic diseases, and alleviate pain and suffering for millions of Americans every day. But medicines can also cause harm. When someone has

been harmed by a medicine, they have had an adverse drug event. To reduce the risk of harm from adverse drug events adults should:

Keep a list of your medicines

Follow directions

Ask questions

Keep up with any blood testing recommended by your doctor

Take pain relievers and antibiotics only as directed

Adverse drug events are a large public health problem.

Adverse drug events cause over 700,000 emergency department visits each year. Nearly 120,000 patients each year need to be hospitalized for further treatment after emergency visits for adverse drug events. As more and more people take more medicines, the risk of adverse events may increase.

As people age, they typically take more medicines. Older adults (65 years or older) are twice as likely as others to come to emergency departments for adverse drug events (over 177,000 emergency visits each year) and nearly seven times more likely to be hospitalized after an emergency visit.

[Top of Page](#)

Some medicines require blood testing and these are more likely to cause serious adverse events.

Some medicines need blood testing to help make sure the dose is just right for you. Over 40% of emergency visits which require patients to be hospitalized are caused by just a few of these medicines which require regular monitoring with blood tests.

Tip:

Ask if you need blood testing. Ask your doctor or pharmacist if you are taking any medicines that need blood testing and pay particular attention to taking these drugs properly and getting regular blood testing and follow-up. Common drugs that can require monitoring are

Blood thinners (e.g., [warfarin](#))

Diabetes medicines (e.g., [insulin](#))

Seizure medicines (e.g., [phenytoin](#), [carbamazepine](#))

Heart medicine (e.g., [digoxin](#))

[Top of Page](#)

Unintentional overdoses of pain relievers cause many deaths

Medicines to relieve pain improve the quality of life for millions of Americans. However, in 2004, over 7,500 Americans died of unintentional overdoses of opioid analgesics (pain medicines such as [methadone](#), [oxycodone](#), and [hydrocodone](#)), more people than from cocaine or heroin

Tip:

Take pain relievers only as directed. If you are taking opioid pain relievers, be sure to tell your doctor about all other medicines you are taking because some medicines, when taken with pain relievers, can cause an overdose.

[Top of Page](#)

Some medicines may not be effective in improving your health

Antibiotics can kill bacteria but not viruses. Most colds, coughs, flu, sore throats, and runny noses are caused by viruses. Taking antibiotics for viral infections will not cure viral infections, keep others from catching the illness, or help you feel better. Although antibiotics are good drugs for certain types of infections, they are also the type of medicines that cause the most emergency visits for adverse drug events. Nearly 100,000 adults are treated in emergency departments each year because of adverse events from antibiotics.

Tip:

Do not ask for antibiotics when a doctor says they are not needed. They will not help treat viral infections.

If you are prescribed an antibiotic, make sure to take all the medicine as prescribed, even if you feel better. Do not save antibiotics "for later."

[Top of Page](#)

For More Information

[For Safe Use of Oral Anticoagulants, SOS Rx](#)

[Unintentional Drug Poisoning in the United States, CDC](#)

[Emergency Department Visits Involving Nonmedical Use of Selected Prescription Drugs—United States, 2004–2008, CDC](#)

[Tips to Prevent Poisonings, CDC](#)

[Get Smart: Know When Antibiotics Work, CDC](#)

[Top of Page](#)

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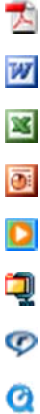
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[Home](#)

[A-Z Index](#)

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A-Z Index

1. A

2. B

3. C

4. D

5. E

6. F

7. G

8. H

9. I

10. J

11. K

12. L

13. M

14. N

15. O

16. P

17. Q

18. R

19. S

20. T

21. U

22. V

23. W

24. X

25. Y

26. Z

27. #